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ORESULTS OF A SURVEY--FL SUPERVISORY EXPERIENCE WITH HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS, AND OPINIONS CONCERNING FACTORS AFFECTING ENROLLMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL RUSSIAN.

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PUB DATE 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.56 12P.

DESCRIPTORS- *SURVEYS, *RUSSIAN, *SECONDARY SCHOOLS, *LANGUAGE TEACHERS, *ENROLLMENT INFLUENCES, LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT, SUPERVISORS, ENROLLMENT RATE, ENROLLMENT TRENDS, PROGRAM EVALUATION, TEACHER IMPROVEMENT, TEACHER INFLUENCE, TEACHING QUALITY, SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, STUDENT ATTITUDES, MODERN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM, NDEA INSTITUTES, CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE,

A SURVEY OF 45 SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL FROM 22 STATES AND ONE FOREIGN COUNTRY ATTENDING THE 1967 NDEA FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE HELD AT CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE PROVIDED A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO ANALYZE NATIONAL THINKING ON THE PROBLEM OF UNSTABLE ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL RUSSIAN PROGRAMS AND, CONSEQUENTLY, TO SUGGEST WAYS OF REGAINING LOSSES AND FORESTALLING THE COMPLETE COLLAPSE OF ANY LANGUAGE PROGRAM FACING SUCH A DILEMMA. SURVEY DATA REVEAL THAT (1) 19 OF THE 23 DISTRICTS IN WHICH RUSSIAN WAS TAUGHT REGARDED THE PATTERN OF INCREASE AND RETENTION IN THE STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE UNFAVORABLE, (2) RUSSIAN STANDS ONLY A POOR-TO-FAIR CHANCE OF CONTINUING AS A RELATIVELY STRONG SECONDARY-SCHOOL LANGUAGE OFFERING, AND (3) THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR INFLUENCING THE INCREASE OR DECREASE IN ENROLLMENT WAS TEACHER SUCCESS OR FAILURE. TO A LESSER DEGREE, COMMUNITY ATTITUDES AND STUDENT NEEDS AFFECTED INCREASED POPULARITY WHILE THE REPUTED DIFFICULTY OF THE LANGUAGE, NEGATIVE TEACHER, COUNSELOR, AND ADMINISTRATOR ATTITUDES, AND INAPPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CONTRIBUTED TO ENROLLMENT DECLINE. CHANGING ATTITUDES AND LANGUAGE NEEDS ALSO HAVE A TENDENCY TO CONTROL BOTH THE LANGUAGE LEARNER AND COURSE ACCEPTANCE. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT A MEETING OF THE ARIZONA CHAPTER OF ATSEEL, TUCSON, ARIZONA, NOVEMBER 4, 1967. (AB)

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RESULTS OF A SURVEY: FL SUPERVISORY EXPERIENCE WITH HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS, AND OPINIONS CONCERNING FACTORS AFFECTING ENROLLMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL RUSSIAN

by John F. Bockman

A decade ago, Sputnik thrust the Russian language willy-nilly into the secondary curriculum. Russian has since found an uncertain niche among the commonly taught foreign languages in American high schools. Some Russian programs seem to have proved their viability; others have withered and died, perhaps never to be resurrected. The rather reckless proliferation of secondary Russian programs may have been limited largely to the first half of the decade. The 1000-student drop in secondary Russian enrollment in 1964 would seem to indicate that this may be true. In any case, suspicion is widespread that interest in Russian at the high school level is in decline.

The 1967 NDEA Foreign Language Leadership Institute, Central Washington State College, which I attended, provided a unique opportunity to focus professional leadership attention upon the Russian enrollment problem. The forty-five participants were foreign language supervisors and coordinators from twenty-two states and one foreign country. Among them were fourteen high school department chairmen, five supervisors of more than one school in a system, twenty-five city or large system supervisors or coordinators, and one state supervisor. Informal discussion revealed that there were several present or former teachers of Russian among the participants and on the staff. There was widespread interest in facing the problem of unstable or inadequate Russian enrollment.

The composition and geographical distribution of the group was such that a survey of the sort attempted should constitute a good sampling of

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the thinking of foreign language supervisory personnel nationally. The survey was taken at a favorable midpoint in the Institute. Members had achieved optimum conditions of working and thinking together. Pressures of group reporting and synthesizing had not yet weakened opportunities for consideration of unofficial issues.

Originally I had hoped that this subject in an expanded form, i.e. including factors affecting enrollment in the uncommonly taught languages as well, would become the topic of study by a working committee. So many topics were proposed, however, that the staff imposed a limit of eight which were deemed most universally pertinent to supervisory activities. While this survey was an individual undertaking, and not even my own personal project, the Institute director approved and supported it, and a member of the staff gave valuable assistance in developing the form.

I have already expressed my concern over the general subject of Russian enrollment. I am unwilling to watch Russian programs falter without a sincere effort to analyze causes and suggest steps to recoup losses or forestall collapse, if it seems imminent. The survey is in line with this concern.

As you may already know, we have introduced Chinese into two of our high schools. I see this as an opportunity to study what may have occurred to Russian when it was first introduced almost a decade ago, and to attempt to modify from the very beginning some of the factors which I suspect have been responsible for some of the problems met by Russian. I hope to say more about this later.

The survey is part of a continuing effort, therefore, and I hope to learn a great deal more about the factors which work to cause increase and decrease in language enrollment than I now know.

I made a number of assumptions as I set about developing an approach to solicit information and opinions from the supervisors. They include: 1) American attitudes toward Russians and American needs in Russian language study were subtly but significantly different during the second half of the past decade than they had been during the first half; 2) Changed attitudes toward a people and a change in the concept of language need or desirability can cause a rather profound change in the capacity of the learner to master their language; and 3) One may extrapolate future enrollment conditions from the history of change and may take steps to modify circumstances under which the language is taught if one wishes to salvage a program. These assumptions were not spelled out to Institute participants either in discussion or in writing.

My own experience as a student of Russian in recent years, and observation of the reactions of some of my own students seemed to corroborate recent research of Wallace E. Lambert and others. Their studies suggest that as an individual successfully acquires a second language, he gradually adopts various aspects of behavior which characterize the members of the other linguistic-cultural group. The more proficient one becomes in the second language, the more he may find that his place in his original membership group is modified. The two cultures may be more or less compatible, and in the case of Russian, unless the student is led to identify with an unreal or truncated Russian society, the incompatibility may be expected to be rather great. The student may experience feelings of chagrin, regret, or even guilt as he experiences loss of ties in his own group, mixed with the fearful anticipation of entering a new and unknown group. This will be further modified as he senses in himself strong admiration, a sort of

fearful respect, an ambiguous warmth, contempt or even hatred toward the new culture. It would seem that inevitable feelings of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction will characterize the serious student of a second language. These feelings may lead to language failure or efforts to escape the discomfort through withdrawal. The effects of all this will be additionally modified by the quality of the need that is felt for the language by the individual.

To be ultimately successful, the learner, it seems, must want to identify with members of the other linguistic-cultural group and be willing to take on very subtle aspects of their behavior. Tests made on various groups of Canadian-French, American-French, and American-Jewish students seem to show that a person's capacity to learn a language depends on his attitude toward the people who speak the language. Unfavorable stereotypes toward the people whose language one is supposed to learn have an adverse effect upon one's ability to learn. In itself, this condition may not discourage students from enrolling in the language in our high schools, but subsequent lack of success due to the operation of social-psychological interferences may weaken confidence in the program and ultimately work to its downfall.

I am firmly convinced of the validity and eventual knowability of these and other subtle psychological processes attending second-language learning. I doubt they can or will be much longer ignored. And as I said, I assume that present American attitudes toward Russians are different from what they were when Russian was first introduced, and I assume that these changed attitudes are to some degree instrumental in complicating the learning of Russian for many students.

With these things in mind, I constructed a survey form to elicit four categories of responses: 1) Information concerning the characteristics of the Russian program, if any, in the respondent's district, its past growth, enrollment patterns, etc.; 2) Opinions concerning the probability of given factors helping, hurting, or being inconsequential during each of the two five-year periods of the decade; 3) Opinions concerning factors which are potentially most influential as causes of increase in Russian enrollment and in the enrollment of any uncommonly taught language; and 4) Opinions concerning factors which are potentially most influential as causes of decrease in Russian enrollment and in the enrollment of any uncommonly taught language.

The survey form was distributed to the forty-five participants and to three staff members who represented public school districts. Forty-one forms were returned, representing forty widely scattered districts.

To summarize the supervisors' experience with Russian programs, the survey revealed that 23 districts are currently teaching Russian, about half the districts represented by all Institute participants. Nineteen of the 23 reported that the pattern of increase and retention in Russian is unfavorable in the prognosis. Nine thought that their Russian programs, nevertheless, stood a <u>fair</u> chance of continuing in a flourishing state; nine thought theirs stood a <u>poor</u> chance (39%). Two supervisors were pinning some optimism to the employment of new teachers of Russian whom they expected either to get Russian off to a good start or to pull Russian out of a slump.

Among comments typical of experience are these: "We tried twice to introduce Russian. The enrollment was insufficient to offer the course."

"Enrollment is decreasing at an ever faster rate." "Russian is succeeding only because I teach Russian and give the enrollment artificial respiration each year." "Russian failed in our school in spite of pressure from the Russian department at X College and from members of the Board who were also members of the Russian Department at X College." "We will begin Russian in September with eight students." "We have one qualified teacher of Russian. When and if we find two more we will start a program in the other three high schools." "Russian has been hurt because we begin it in the 9th grade while the other languages start in the 7th."

Where Russian has never been taught, two out of three supervisors thought there are <u>poor</u> chances of starting one now. Only two thought the chances are <u>fair</u>, and only one thought the chances are good.

It would seem that the likelihood of reviving a lapsed Russian program is better. Five supervisors in districts where Russian studies have been terminated thought there is a fair chance of offering Russian again some day, and two thought the chances are very good.

In summary, the majority opinion in this matter seems to be that Russian stands only a poor-to-fair chance of continuing to be a flourishing foreign language program on the secondary level. Little serious thought is being given to initiating Russian programs, but there seems to be a reasonable possibility of reviving a Russian program where it has died out. This contingency, however, would seem to require more urgent reason than now exists. I gathered that the hiring of a highly qualified, very understanding teacher of Russian primarily for some <u>other</u> teaching field, might be an adequate reason in a few places. One thing seemed quite certain -- the typical district is not going out of its way for a Russian teacher.

If these summaries do indeed represent a sampling of supervisory thinking nationally, a reasonable suggestion would be that the profession concentrate on improving the quality and relevance of existing Russian programs. With a trail of terminated and faltering Russian programs behind us, it would seem a futile business to try to get Russian added to more and more schools.

To test the supervisors' reaction to the suggestion that the interplay of factors affecting Russian enrollment was different in each of the two five-year periods of the past decade, I constructed a check-list of possible factors, with room for additions, requiring the respondent to think of the factor in terms of its helping, hurting, or being inconsequential as an influence upon enrollment in each of the two five-year periods. In one sense I may have been imposing the assumption upon the supervisors, but on the other hand they were free to respond that there had been no differences.

The factors were drawn from such considerations as the historical environment, school and student involvement in the issues, the nature of teacher involvement, the nature of the language itself, and differing materials and methodologies.

I confess that it has been very difficult to interpret the discriminations made by the supervisors. It is significant, I think, that they <u>did</u> discriminate between the two half-decades, proving, I suppose, that they either bought my assumption or found it consonant with their own experience. The simplest sort of interpretation that suggests itself from a study of the responses is that there <u>is</u> a consensus about what has been

inconsequential, what has been of help, and what has been of harm.

For example, it seems we may be safe in disregarding the following factors because they, in themselves, have neither helped nor hurt Russian enrollment at any time: 1) Fear of Communism; 2) Extreme Right Activity in a Community; 3) Heterogeneity or Homegeneity of Students Taking Russian; 4) Native as Opposed to Non-Native Teachers; 5) Traditional High School Teaching Materials; and 6) Soviet Teaching Materials.

It seems that anyone interested in the teaching of Russian in high schools ought to take careful note of the ever-rising importance of the following factors as potentially helpful influences on enrollment: 1) Prestige Accruing to Students from Studying Russian; 2) the Goals of Students Qua Teen-Agers in the American Society; 3) NDEA-Trained Teachers; and 4) Audio-Lingual or "New Key" Materials and Methodologies.

The Russian teaching profession should apparently tend to disregard the following factors because they are of ever-declining significance as influences of any kind on enrollment: 1) Soviet Space Achievements; 2) The Prestige of the School Accruing from Offering Russian; and 3) Non-Native as Opposed to Native Teachers.

Finally, it seems that anyone interested in promoting the teaching of secondary Russian ought to take careful note of the ever-rising importance of the following factors as potentially harmful influences on enrollment: 1) Attitudes of Counselors and Administrators; 2) the Reputed Difficulty of the Russian Language; and 3) Teachers with Very Limited Audio-Lingual Competence.

One gets the distinct impression from the discriminations made by the supervisors that during the first five-year period of the decade, the novelty of Russian language instruction overrode teacher and program incompetencies while capitalizing on the positive effects of the historical

environment and the unrealistic or ill-defined goals of students. In the second five-year period, on the other hand, the incompetencies have become liabilities, the historical advantage has been neutralized, and a stricter accounting must be paid in justification of the Russian program to students, counselors, administrators, and taxpayers.

In the third part of the survey, supervisors were asked to isolate in their thinking the factors which they thought are potentially most influential in causing an increase in Russian enrollment, and those which they thought are most influential in causing a decrease in Russian enrollment. Some aspect of teacher success, on the one hand, and some aspect of teacher failure, on the other hand, are so overwhelmingly mentioned as to make all other factors meaningless in the comparison.

After teacher success, community attitudes and the needs of students are most frequently mentioned as factors causing enrollment to increase. And after teacher failure, the reputed difficulty of the language; the negative attitude of teachers, counselors and administrators; and college teaching materials used in high school are most frequently mentioned as causing enrollment to decline.

Among the comments given to these sections are these: "I feel that teacher competence, attitude, and enthusiasm are the most important factors in maintaining a program once it is initiated. This is especially so with subjects not firmly or traditionally established in the curriculum." "Of all the factors, I think the most important single one is the teacher. . I would like to keep the Russian program going." "Too many Russian teachers seem to feel that Russian is only for the exceptionally talented."

Indeed the crux of the success or failure of a Russian program may be, in the final analysis, little more than teacher success or failure. At the very least, what is needed for success goes far beyond mere language competence. In the complex are a multitude of attitudes and skills conducive to understanding and motivating teenaged American students, the ability to set up for them and help them achieve realistic objectives in keeping with their needs and goals, notable success in leading them to higher objectives and goals, and phenomenal success in attracting ever greater numbers of potentially successful students to an extended study of what might be for many of them a difficult subject.

The learning of any foreign language is one of the most difficult of human skills to develop, but we do not have to agree with Aristotle that there is no learning without pain. What is difficult may be more pleasurefully challenging than painful. One way or another, however, and sooner or later, some selection must be made of those who can profit from prolonged foreign language training. Whether this selection can honestly be done as soon as we have been trying to do it, is really a moot question.

If the public schools were to select from among those students who wish to enroll in Russian, only those who by an arbitrary standard have great potential for success, there would be years in which Russian could not be offered at all in some of our high schools, and enrollment would always be prohibitively low in all of our high schools.

The imperatives facing the schools, therefore, are these: 1) to justify offering a Russian program, the school must admit and permit to continue students, the majority of whom probably have little chance for mastery of Russian under present academic conditions; and 2) the school must provide valuable personal objectives for the student through the Russian program that are not better achieved elsewhere.

I alluded earlier to our new Chinese program and said that I thought it was providing us with a valuable case study of what happens when a new language program is initiated.

Using the situation at Catalina as typical, there are 20 students of Chinese 1. The breakdown by grade shows that 15 (75%) are juniors and seniors, and only one (5%) is a freshman. This class was given the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery. The results show that twelve (60%) would seem to have excellent chances for foreign language success, and none have questionable chances for success. This is a far from typical example of a first-year language class in our district.

The Russian 1 class, on the other hand, has 27 students, four (15%) of whom are juniors. There are no seniors, and eighteen (67%) are freshmen. I did not administer the aptitude test to these students, but I propose that the scores would probably not be notably different from those of a typical foreign language class in the district.

Taking a typical class of 31 beginning Spanish students, we find that nine (29%) have excellent chances of success according to the test, and three (10%) have questionable chances of success. This may be the normal pattern on the East Side of Tucson.

I submit that the situation in Chinese today is descriptive of the conditions under which Russian was introduced a decade ago. I submit, further, that today, Russian enrollment is probably heterogeneous, with a great many average and below average students. These students must be accepted; they must be taught to achieve objectives which they can achieve and which they will want to achieve. Otherwise it is difficult to see how the Russian program can continue to survive.

In final summary, I think the survey points to the crux of the matter--it is all up to the teacher. He must be more than just a fine Russian scholar. He must approach students as potential learners with very different resources, very different needs and goals from those which he had as a student, and from those which he may assume others have or should have.

(Read to the Fall, 1967 meeting of the Arizona Chapter of ATSEEL, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, November 4, 1967.)